

VZCZCXYZ0000
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHDM #0520/01 1501404
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 301404Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3576
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6836
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4552
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3190
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7695
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1776
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5111
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1314
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA//
INFO RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 7438

UNCLAS DAMASCUS 000520

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: Presidential Referendum, Syria/UK, Lebanon, Iraq,
Palestinian Territories (5/29)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on May 29 reported Vice President Shara's meeting on May 28 with former Archbishop Hilarion Capucci in which they discussed the regional situation and the international community's disregard of the oppression of the

Palestinians under Israel's abusive practices. Shara expressed Syria's appreciation of Capucci's courageous patriotic and humane stances. For his part, Capucci expressed his joy at visiting Syria as it experiences the festivities of renewing President Asad's constitutional term, and stated his pride in Syrian national unity and the spirit of coexistence and tolerance of its people.

Papers also reported that a large British Parliamentary delegation visited Damascus. A group headed by MP Richard Spring met with FM Mouallem on May 28. Mouallem briefed them on the latest developments in the Middle East including in Palestine, Iraq and Lebanon. Mouallem reiterated the importance Israel withdrawing from the occupied Arab lands, including the Syrian Golan, and the importance of implementing relevant UN resolutions. As for Iraq, the Foreign Minister pointed to the discussions held during the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit and the goals that must be achieved to realize a political solution in Iraq. Regarding the situation in Lebanon, Mouallem underlined the importance of having Lebanese consensus on all issues facing Lebanon in a manner that achieves security and stability. He also warned against imposing choices upon Lebanon that could increase division in the Lebanese society.

Also on May 28, VP Attar met with another group of British Parliamentary members headed by Labor Party MP John Grogan. Attar pointed out that it is necessary for the world to understand the true situation in the Middle East and work to guarantee everyone's rights. He also praised the role of the British-Syrian Association in enhancing communication between the Syrian and British peoples. Answering the group's questions on the situation in Iraq, al-Attar stated that the US occupation there created a fertile ground for terrorism and caused difficult humanitarian situations. He also pointed out that the solution for the situation in the Middle East lies in changing US policy and strategy, something that Europe can have a part in achieving.

Articles, reports, and official statements published in the newspapers today portray the May 27 referendum on the nomination of

President Asad for a new 7-year term in office and the reportedly "heavy" voter turnout at home and abroad as a message to the world that the Syrian people fully support their president and his domestic and foreign policies.

Government-owned Al-Ba'th and independent al-Watan featured a story by US journalist and academic Franklin Lamb who entered the Naher el-Bared refugee camp in disguise and carried out an investigation with people of the camp. The article was published on May 26 by a US website bulletin called "Counter Punch" and shed light on the involvement of the governing team in Lebanon in financing the Fateh al-Islam group to achieve its goals, namely to blame Syria and Al-Qaeda this group's actions.

Ziyad Haydar a commentator in independent al-Watan, offered a Syrian reading of the developments in north Lebanon, noting that Syria is concerned about the Lebanese army as it sees attempts to weaken and divide it.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"Results of the presidential referendum will be announced today. Arab and international figures: Syrians rallying behind President Asad is an important message to the world on rejecting hegemony" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/29)

"Vice President Farouk Shara discusses Palestinian developments with former Metropolitan of Jerusalem Archbishop Hilarion Capucci. Capucci: We are proud of Syria's national unity" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/29)

"Vice President Attar and Foreign Minister Mouallem review latest regional developments with a British Parliamentary Delegation.

Members of the delegation stress Syria's pivotal role in achieving peace and stability in the Middle East, affirming that there can be no peace without Syria" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/29)

"Intermittent clashes in the neighborhood of Nahr el-Barid. No solution in the horizon. The Opposition: Who started shooting at the Lebanese army seeks to drag the army into a war of camps" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 5/29)

"Franklin Lamb: Financial disputes detonated the Nahr al-Barid incidents. Al-Mostaqbal Block finances the Jund al-Sham and Fath al-Islam groups" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 5/29)

"First US-Iranian talks since 27 years; Crocker: The Baghdad meeting was positive. Iranian envoy Kazemi: The meeting is a first step" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 5/29)

"Two Palestinians injured in an Israeli assault in Gaza. An Israeli incursion into Jericho. An Israeli minister: A comprehensive ceasefire in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is dangerous for Israel" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/29)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Syrian Reading of North Lebanon Developments: Questions need Answers and Fears about the Lebanese Army"

Ziyad Haydar, a commentator in independent al-Watan, wrote (5/29):
"The incidents at the Nahr al-Barid camp in Tripoli are a source of concern for Damascus, especially since Lebanon's security remains central for Syria's security....

"The Tripoli incidents were given the required analysis and follow-up in light of their sensitivity, brutality, and similarity to the criminal methods that Al-Qa'ida Organization adopts, where bodies were mutilated and victims were slaughtered while they were asleep.

"The conclusions were consistent with the psychological burden that the picture leaves, in terms of concern for Lebanon first and then for the Lebanese Army mainly. The army is the most respected and solid establishment in Lebanon and it is close to Syria from a political perspective. The responsibilities that the army is shouldering, however, have become exhausting, even without the additional burden of the incidents in the north. The army is now scattered along the northeastern border with Syria, the southern border with Israel, and the streets of the capital as a result of the political tension. There is, therefore, concern that the army was deliberately dragged into these incidents, which the security forces started and left the army to complete. There are elaborate questions about the nature of the relationship between the security forces, which are under the control of the ruling team, and the growth of an organization that emerged only a few months ago and that managed in a few-hour battle to inflict this amount of losses on the army of a country.

"There are also no doubts about American journalist Seymour Hersh's revelations regarding the relationship between Arab countries and figures in the ruling team on the one hand and Fatah al-Islam on the other, especially in light of the growth in the organization's power. It is possible, however, that the organization has indeed gone out of control, which dictates that it be dealt with seriously, leaving the army to shoulder this responsibility.

"The concern stems from the fear that what happened might be a deliberate and planned attempt to weaken and divide the army by dragging it into a battle with a militia the results of which cannot possibly be in the Army's favor unless the Army resorts to destructive military intervention. Such intervention would cause painful humanitarian consequences for the Palestinians and open old wounds. It would also turn the other Palestinian camps into volatile hotbeds threatening escalation. Furthermore, it might lead

to the dispersal of the leaders of the organization, like any other militia. In this case, instability, which is confined to a limited area in the north, might spill all over Lebanon, specifically in the south....

"Some people believe that the timing is meant to tell the world not to hesitate in taking any position toward Lebanon (as the case now with Qatar, Russia, China, and Indonesia) and to speed up the establishment of the tribunal under Chapter Seven without examining the consequences of such a step for Lebanon's civil peace, as this peace will be taken care of by local parties."

"A Message from the People"

Muhammad Khayr al-Jammali, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (5/29): "The Syrian people sent a message to all forces of evil, hatred, and conspiracy, a message that essentially says that Syria has one option; namely, this creative cohesion between the loyal people and the sincere leader and this solid adherence to the national and pan-Arab policy that President Asad is leading in defense of Syria's interests and the Arab nation's rights...."

Corbin